

A Mission of Hope

by MyLittleYellowBird

Category: Call the Midwife

Genre: Drama

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-13 23:06:17

Updated: 2016-04-20 15:44:25

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:32:29

Rating: T

Chapters: 4

Words: 5,124

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The nuns, nurses and medics answer a distress call from a hospital mission in South Africa. Inspired by the press release for the 2016 Christmas special, this fic is completely AU guesswork. I'm just here for the ride. Also published on my " blog and on Tumblr. We've got a tenacious fandom over there, come join us!

1. Chapter 1

In the weeks since the thalidomide scandal broke out, a strange melancholy had come over the Kenilworth Row Maternity Home and its staff. While no new babies had been born afflicted by the ravages of the cruel drug, every day brought with it the worry that today, another would appear. Even the start of the holiday season did little to dissipate the grim mood.

The drug had been officially banned in the United Kingdom, and calls came up through the medical profession demanding new standards in pharmaceutical testing. If there was any good that could come from this terrible chapter, it would be stronger regulations to prevent such a tragedy from ever occurring again. But that was little comfort to mothers like Rhoda Mullocks.

Patrick Turner stepped from his car, turning the key to lock the door and headed up the stone steps from street level to the flat's entrance. To keep the spirit of Christmas up for the children, Shelagh had insisted they decorate for the holiday. Today, she had hung a wreath on the door. He did appreciate all Shelagh was doing to maintain some sense of normal, even if he found it hard to assist. He would have to make a greater effort. He swallowed heavily and entered the flat.

The sounds of carols on the radio greeted him as he hung his coat in the hall, the scent of mince pies filling the air. He suspected the early baking was more to keep his wife's mind occupied than a desire to stock up on holiday pastry. More than anyone else, Shelagh understood his sense of guilt and even felt a sense of her own

culpability. Both knew they had acted in the best interests of their patients, that there had been no malpractice, but the knowledge that it was their misplaced trust in modern medicine made it all the harder to continue caring for the poor of Poplar. He pushed forward and went to meet his family.

Timothy sat in an armchair, his Biology text balanced on his knees as he copied a diagram. He didn't look completely happy about his position, having been ejected from his preferred spot at the table. The boy had a desk in his room but preferred to sit with his mother and sister as he worked on his studies. Patrick wondered how the boy could get anything done now that Angela refused to stay within the confines of her play yard. She seemed to take great delight from piling her toys on her brother as he worked.

Shelagh looked up from the washing she was folding. "Hello, dear," she greeted him, raising her cheek for his light kiss.

"Dad, there's a letter for you postmarked from South Africa!" Tim announced.

"South Africa?" he wondered, his brow furrowing.

Before he could give the letter any more attention, he felt a tug on his trouser leg and looked down to see two-year-old Angela's bright eyes and saucy smile. Pushing aside the sting of guilt he felt each time he pushed away his burdens, he crouched down to her level. "Hello, Miss Angela. It's a pleasure to see you." He picked up her soft hand, lifted it to his lips and was rewarded with the same shy smile of delight he so often saw play across his wife's face.

Wrapping his daughter in his arms, he stood. "What's that about a letter, Tim?" he asked. His eyes squinted as Angela patted his cheeks.

"It's got a stamp from South Africa. Who do you know from there?" Tim asked. He handed the letter up, avoiding his sister's inquisitive fingers.

Patrick turned the letter over in his hands. "Hope Mission," he read aloud. "M. Fitzsimmons." He thought for a moment, remembering. "We went to medical school together. She went down there sometime after the war, I think. I wonder what she has to say to me?"

"There was a woman in your medical school class, Dad?" Tim was amazed.

"Women can become doctors, Timothy," Shelagh admonished from beyond the kitchen hatch.

"They can now, Mum. But Dad went to school so long ago, I didn't think it was possible."

"Mind your cheek, Tim," Patrick warned, his grin hidden by Angela's hands. "There were three in my class when we started, I'll have you know." He caught his son's eyes, halting any further response. "And no, it wasn't so long ago that one of them was named 'Eve.'"

"Can the letter wait a bit longer, dearest? Dinner's just ready."

Shelagh carried in a bowl of roasted sprouts.

Patrick placed the letter on the mantle. "I suppose it won't hurt to wait until later. I'm famished."

Evenings were the easiest time to forget about the troubles within the practice, when self-reproach gave way to love. There was a tacit agreement to put the focus on family for the few hours they had before the children went to bed. The lively chatter of a bright young man and the happy little girl kept the mood light and made preparations for the holiday possible.

Patrick stood in doorway of the bath and watched as Shelagh gave Angela's hair a final rinse. The little girl sputtered and squealed with laughter.

"She'll turn into a mermaid one day," he laughed. He opened the towel and put out his arms, scooping up the slippery child. "I'll dress her tonight."

He passed by Tim's room on the way to the nursery. "Ready for the Biology exam tomorrow, Tim?"

"I think so. I'm fairly certain I know my all the enzymes."

Patrick shifted the wiggly girl on his hip. "Enzymes aren't all that hard, Tim. Just remember to break it down."

Timothy rolled his eyes at the terrible pun. "Can I have the stamp when you've finished your letter?"

"Right. I nearly forgot."

Shelagh joined them in the hallway. "You go read your letter, Patrick. I'll get Angela to sleep tonight," she suggested.

With a kiss on Angela's little nose and a quick one on his wife's cheek, Patrick left his family to settle in for the night.

He sat staring into space, absently tapping the letter against his chin when Shelagh returned.

"Good news, I hope," she said as she settled on the couch next to him. Her hand slid around his arm, finding his hand. They'd have one last cup of tea and set to wrapping gifts.

He sat up a bit and put the letter on her lap. "Interesting news, anyway. Myra Fitzsimmons was always...she's an unusual person. She wasn't the only woman in our class, but she was the most ambitious, maybe more ambitious than any of us. She was older and had years of medical training before she came to school-she lied about her age to be accepted as a nurse in the First World War, then went on to serve in Liverpool Hospital for another ten years or so." He laughed softly. "I don't suppose she relished the idea of listening to anyone, much less a man, so she left nursing and joined our class. Some of the old instructors were pretty rough on her, but she held firm. I think she was the only one to never faint in anatomy class!"

Shelagh lifted the letter to examine it more closely. "It must have

been difficult for her. In my experience, most doctors can be ...condescending... when treating women as patients. In the classroom, they must've been insufferable!"

Patrick turned to her in mock outrage.

"Present company excepted, dearest." She pressed her cheek against his shoulder. "Were you friends?"

"Not friends, exactly. Myra Fitzsimmons didn't make friends easily, but she was an excellent lab partner. No nonsense, and the quickest diagnostician I ever knew. She signed up with the RAMC during the World War II and got stationed in Cape Town, and decided to stay."

"So why did she write you? Is she coming back to England? We could use someone like her here in Poplar." Shelagh stifled a yawn.

"Actually, no. She runs a mission on the East Cape, and it looks like they're in trouble." He turned to face Shelagh. "She wants us to go down there."

2. Chapter 2

The high street teemed with shoppers, mostly women trying to get Christmas shopping done in the few hours left before school let out that day. They moved with the efficiency of a person with too much to do and too little time to do it. Shelagh nodded her head in greeting as she passed friendly faces, grateful no one seemed set on little visits. She had two hours to complete her task and get Angela back to Mrs. Penney before clinic began.

They crossed the street when the scent of baked goods made Shelagh stop. "Oh, Angela!" she cried, "I've forgotten the biscuits I meant to bring today." It was no wonder. Things were already busy at it was. She was mad to even try this.

Angela's ears perked up at her favorite word. "Bizkit!" She cheered. Shelagh's brow wrinkled in frustration and she scanned the area. "Oh, alright, we'll stop and bring some apple fritters with us to Freddy's house, shall we?" Angela clapped her hands in excitement.

"Got some luvley fritters here, Missus, fresh from me oven," a voice called. Shelagh turned to see an apron-clad man beside a heavy cart laden with baked goods. He snapped a brown paper bag open. From the look of him, he clearly appreciated the quality of his baked goods. "How many'll do ya?"

"Half a dozen, please." Peter Noakes might like one or two as well.

"How 'bout one fer the li'l princess? This itty bitty one's not so hot." The vendor took one from the tray and handed it to Angela. "Sweet fer the sweet, I always say." He grinned at Shelagh, an appreciative glint in his eye. "One fer her mother, too, eh?"

Shelagh shot a look at the hefty man. "Cheek!" She paid for the

pastries and turned the push chair in the direction of the Noakes family's home.

"Yer husband's a lucky man, Missus!"

Ordinarily, the baker's innocent flirting would have cheered her, but for days the letter from South Africa weighed on her mind. Patrick was oddly disinterested, and their discussion that night left Shelagh feeling that there was a larger problem at hand.

"I haven't heard from Myra in years," he had said after she finished reading the long letter. "I wonder why she thought to reach out to me? It's not as if I have the power or connections she needs-or even the skills, for that matter! She'd be better off contacting Jim Pearson, he's chief of staff at the Liverpool now, or Herbert Crenshaw even. He's still teaching at St. Thomas's." He got up from the sofa and paced the room, his hands threading through his hair. "They're more likely to be able to send aid."

Shelagh watched as he opened the case of files he had taken to bringing home each evening. He was nearly finished with a second review, each night searching for connections between patients that had been prescribed Distaval. The late nights were beginning to show on his face.

"Perhaps she thought a general practitioner in the poorest district in London might have some understanding of how to manage in less than ideal surroundings." Shelagh tried to keep the worry from her voice. While Patrick's self-confidence had suffered, she was most concerned that he found less fulfillment in his work of late, and less a sense of his own worth. "Really, Patrick, I should think you're much more qualified than most. Your ambitions run to helping those most in need of help, not your own advancement."

He hadn't turned back to her then, as she had expected. They had a way of accepting compliments from each other, usually with a smile and a wink, but Patrick had ignored her. "I'll have to answer her of course," he said, "but I can't see how we can help. We've got enough on our plate here as it is."

The conversation ended with that, but for the last two days, Shelagh had not been able to forget it. Patrick was right. Things here in Poplar were busy enough as it is, they couldn't possibly find a way to help, and the thought of Patrick going away for a so long was too much to bear.

Yet the idea kept niggling at the back of her mind. What if, by some miracle, they could do something? What if all the bureaucratic potholes and ordinary realities were all taken care of? There was something in his eyes when he read the letter to her, a gleam of hope she hadn't seen for weeks.

The effects of the thalidomide scandal weighed heavily upon Patrick's shoulders, she knew, and he felt the blame sorely. Patrick was more than a doctor. He was a healer and felt a deep connection and responsibility for his patients. It was one of the things she loved the most about him.

It was also the thing that worried her most. Baby Susan Mullucks was always there in his mind, a permanent reminder of his unintentional

mistake. While he was able to push through the anguish that caused and continue with his practice, Patrick's conviction was shaken. Perhaps a trip to Dr. Fitzsimmons' mission what just what he needed to get it back.

They stopped at the Noakes' door and Shelagh took a deep breath. "Well, Angela, nothing ever started by staying." She knocked on the door.

The reception room of the Christian Missionary Society was as dark and imposing as any building Shelagh had ever been in. Walnut paneling covered the walls, rich with the patina of years, it had the imposing effect of making her feel quite insignificant. If it weren't for the tall woman beside her, she wasn't completely certain she wouldn't turn tail and head back to Poplar.

"No need to be nervous, Shelagh. Johnny's quite a grand chap, really." Chummy assured her.

"Yes, but Chummy, when you said you had a friend here at the Society that could help, I had no idea you meant the Africa Secretary! He must be dreadfully busy. I hate to waste his time." Shelagh fretted with the handle of her handbag.

"Oh, Johnny's never too busy, you'll see. My brother used to say he's never known a fellow to be more energetic about more things!"

The large door opened, and a tall, thin man came out. His eyes immediately fell on the two women.

"Chummy! It's been too long! You told me you'd bring that boy of yours by again. It's been so long since I've seen him he must be ready for Trinity by now!" The stern words were countered by a twinkle in his eye.

"Not quite, though I will say for a three-year-old boy, he's quite advanced. We have hopes he'll be Prime Minister one day!"

Mr. Taylor leaned in conspiratorially. "As long as he sends funds to the Mission Society, he'll get my vote. Least I could do for the nephew of the man that dived into a rugger scrum to save me from the Oxford Huns."

Shelagh watched the two with guarded eyes. The two obviously had a long history together and spoke a sort of upper-class parlance that set them apart. This man, as much of the ruling class as Lady Browne, seemed to be more comfortable in it, and less concerned with the dignity of station. Perhaps Chummy was right to bring her here.

"Oh," Chummy cried. "Where on earth are my manners? Mr. John Taylor, may I present Mrs. Patrick Turner."

With two sets of eyes turned on her, Shelagh felt her confidence falter. What had started out as a simple inquiry was quickly getting out of hand. She reached deep and put on her best Sister Bernadette face.

"How do you do, Mr. Taylor. I'm very grateful you've agreed to meet with us. I hope we're not interrupting your busy schedule."

"No, no. I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Turner. Indeed, I am thrilled! Chummy's told me about your request, and I must say, it's gotten my mind in a whirl!" He gestured towards his office. "Come, let's sit and have a bit of a chat, shall we? Mrs. Mugworth, if you could call down for a tea tray, please?"

Seeing them settled on the leather sofa, he took a seat in a wing chair.

"Your request couldn't come at a better time, Mrs. Turner. Things have changed a great deal in South Africa in the last year, and the Christian Mission Society no longer has a presence in the area. This could be precisely the opportunity we've been looking for."

He leaned forward. "I've taken the opportunity to look into this Hope Mission, and it does seem to be on the brink of closure. Independent missions are shutting down all over Africa, I'm afraid, and without any assistance from the South African government, I'm afraid your friend's hospital won't 'til summer.

"Here's where we can come in. Thanks to a rather large donation year, we have the funds to keep Hope Mission running. The trouble is, we're strapped for manpower. There's no way we can get our people out there in time to make a difference. What we need is an advance team that can go out there and do the dirty work, as it were. A group of about a dozen or so people that can bring in supplies, start an education program, perhaps even do something about the water problem. You have no idea how difficult the water problem can be in these places."

"I can assure you, Johnny, we're quite aware of the dilemma caused by poor water and sewage in Poplar," Chummy interrupted. "Even with the new council flats, we still have people living without running water in some quarters!"

The excitement dimmed from his eyes for a moment. "Yes, you're quite right, Chummy. Our own government has been moving a bit too slowly to care for British poor. There are problems enough no matter where you go, I suppose."

"Mr. Taylor, might I ask how likely any of this is to happen?" Shelagh could feel a spark of an idea start to form in her mind.

"Oh, I'd say if we could get a team formed quickly, we could have the team out there before February."

"February!"

He nodded. "Yes, if this is to work, it needs to happen immediately. Hope Mission is barely hanging on as it is. Much more strain and it will go under completely. And let me say, Mrs. Turner, it's much simpler to improve something we already have than to start from scratch."

3. Chapter 3

"A missionary? Shelagh, I'm as far as you can get from a missionary." Patrick sat at his desk, a pile of files in front of him. Surgery was

about to open, and after a morning of calls to head cold after head cold, he was not prepared to process Shelagh's news. In her excitement since the morning's interview, she had forgotten to plan a strategy. She would have to let him work through this on his own.

With a little help, of course.

"Actually, Patrick, that's not quite true. Even if you leave God out of it, you're as much a missionary as any religious evangelist. You do God's work every day, dearest."

Patrick leaned on the desk, his fingers twitching, pressed to his lips. Shelagh smiled. In the months since Patrick had "given up" cigarettes (not always successfully, she knew), his normal tics had shifted to mimic the old habit. She could see that he craved one now, and felt for him.

"It's too much, Shelagh. We're strapped here as it is. It's simply not possible."

Shelagh walked around the desk and took his face in her hands. "Anything's possible, Patrick. If I know anything, I know that."

They smiled, their own past a testament to that. Shelagh pressed a light kiss to his mouth. "Just think about it, dearest."

* * *

><p>Surgery finished, Patrick held out his wife's coat. "What about Nonnatus? They're understaffed, too. They couldn't possibly afford to lose nurses for so long."<p>

"Mr. Taylor assured me that the Society has enough nurses and doctors here in England that could come and carry the load." She turned to face him. "And it's only for six weeks, Patrick. It's not forever."

He rolled his eyes. "I had a hard enough time leaving Poplar for a week camping, Shelagh. Imagine six weeks!"

She smiled and led the way out the Maternity Home.

* * *

><p>"We could all go? There'd be a place for the children?" Patrick rolled up the remaining Christmas wrap. Perhaps his distracted mind explained the two gifts he had wrapped this evening to Shelagh's dozen.<p>

Shelagh finished tying a bow to the festively wrapped gift before her. "Yes. Mr. Taylor said he could accommodate the children, if we like. Many of their missionaries have families that join them."

"I _couldn't_ leave you and the children, Shelagh. Not that I'm considering it, mind you."

Shelagh chuckled and placed the gift on top of the pile. "There, that's done. I'm glad I learned to get ahead of schedule after things

were so busy last Christmas. Shopping's completed and everything's wrapped. All that's left to do is enjoy the peace of the last week of Advent."

She stood and stretched her back. "I'm for bed, Patrick. Could you put the gifts in the cupboard for me? Behind the old coats like before." She kissed the top of his head. "Come to bed soon, dearest."

"Timothy would never want to go." Patrick closed the bedroom door behind him.

"It's not for very long, Patrick. I'm sure Timothy would be able to manage to keep up with his studies, and I've never known a boy more interested in the outside world."

"But travelling with Angela would be impossible. She's never even been on a train."

"You keep using that word, Patrick. It's not impossible. It's hugely challenging, and we'll need to convince an awful lot of people to support the idea. But this mission is going to happen. The only remaining question is who will go?"

* * *

><p>"Let's do it," he whispered in her ear. "Let's go to Africa."<p>

Shelagh rolled over to face him. In the morning light, he always looked boyish, the glint of eagerness for the day and its challenges keen in his eyes. She had missed that of late.

His hands came to rest at her hips and he kissed her. "If you're completely certain," he said.

She smiled. "I couldn't be more certain."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Yes, I agree. They're not likely to bring Timothy or Angela along, bot for story reasons and practical filming purposes. And there's no evidence that either child is filming.<p>

But this is alternate universe stuff. I'm just here for the ride.

4. Chapter 4

The last Sunday of Advent marked a change in Nonnatus House every year, a shift from contemplation to anticipation. For the faithful, the celebration of the birth of Christ served to renew the spirit. For the others, the sense of tradition and custom helped to ease the stress and pain of life and gave the energy to push forward. After a particularly difficult autumn, the community of Nonnatus needed a new beginning more than ever.

To that end, a gathering had been called after Church services to

present the planned mission. In quiet words, Patrick, Shelagh and Sister Julianne put forth the details and goals to a surprised room. By the time they were finished, the faraway world of the Eastern Cape of South Africa had replaced any thoughts of tree trimming and holiday baking.

"I would like to thank you all for your attention," Sister Julianne's restrained voice cloaked the room in calm. "The Order has committed to sending two nuns along with Dr. and Mrs. Turner, and Mr. Hereward has agreed to go to serve as a liaison with the local church authorities. Beyond that, everyone is free to decide for themselves."

"Thank you, Sister," Patrick joined. He spread his arms out, his hands wide open. "We realize this is unexpected, that we're asking for something quite extraordinary. But we are certain that if any group can help Hope Mission survive, it is this one."

Twelve people sat around the long table of the Nonnatus dining room considering the proposition before them. A six-week long mission to the South African bush was hardly what anyone expected when this meeting was called. Indeed, until an hour ago, the only thing on most minds was the enormous Christmas tree in the sitting room.

"Doctor, may I ask a question," Nurse Phyllis Crane's voice broke the silence.

"Of course."

Phyllis looked around the table, then turned her focus back on Patrick. "This all seems very much a rush job. Even if we were to bring in reinforcements for the community which we now serve, how could we possibly be expected to complete preparations in such a short time?"

Shelagh stood. "Nurse Crane, the Mission Society would make our efforts a priority. They are prepared to meet all of our needs, be it one nurse or ten."

Phyllis leaned forward, her chin against her fist. "This does require some thought."

"Yes, of course," Shelagh responded. She glanced around the table. "However, and I do see the difficulty here, we will need a decision from you as soon as possible if we are to assemble the team from other sources. There will, of course, be no expectation that any of you participates. We simply felt that the project should be presented to you before anyone else."

Phyllis nodded, then continued. "Mrs. Turner, I don't mean to be intrusive, but is it practical to consider bringing children on such a mission?"

Shelagh's lips pressed together and Patrick's hand reached for hers in support. She turned squarely to Nurse Crane and answered, "The Mission assures us that the children will be perfectly safe the entire time. Timothy may continue his studies whilst there, and a local woman will be found to assist in Angela's care." She met Phyllis' eyes determinedly. "As to whether or not it's practical, no, it probably isn't the most practical decision we've ever made."

However, Dr. Turner and I feel there's much for Timothy to gain from this experience... and I couldn't bear to leave Angela behind, even for only six weeks."

Phyllis nodded in understanding. "Of course." She crossed her arms on the table and leaned forward. "Alright then, I suppose I'll have to start learning Afrikaans now. Or perhaps Xhosa! I've heard the clicking sounds are remarkably difficult to reproduce for the European tongue!" She looked around the table, her face eager for the adventure.

"Hear, hear, Nurse Crane," came Tom Hereward's voice from the far end of the table. He studiously avoided Barbara Gilbert's eyes.

"I can go, if the Mother House would like me to," volunteered Sister Mary Cynthia.

"As can I," added Sister Winifred.

Sister Julianne nodded in their direction. "Thank you both. I think it best if we sit together and decide amongst ourselves who should join the mission. There is also Sister Monica Joan to consider. We must not make the change too difficult for our sister. She has taken..." she paused to take a deep breath, "She has taken Sister Evangelina's death very hard and will require extra care."

"Well, I don't need to think about it," Trixie's voice came forcefully through the room. "I've always wanted to travel beyond France. This doesn't sound like The Grand Tour, but I'd love to see Africa." she looked at Sister Julianne. "Sister, if you're quite certain things will be managed without us, I would very much like to go."

The nun nodded. "Of course, but you might want to consider for a day or so?"

"No," Trixie smiled bravely. "I'm definitely on board. Who knows? This could be exactly the change I've wanted."

Patsy looked around the table. "I'm afraid I'm out. I can't speak for Delia, of course, but we've already booked our trip to Paris this spring. I'm not sure we could-" She met Delia's eyes across the table, and a moment of agreement passed between them.

"Of course not," Shelagh answered. "We're not looking for sacrifices from any of you. We hope that anyone who joins us will do so happily. Things will be difficult enough without anyone feeling uncomfortable with their decision."

"Then you can be sure to count on us to hold down the fort here, Shelagh." Patsy's confident smile was meant to reassure, and it did.

"Mrs. T, I'm not so sure why I'm here? There's not much I can do on the medical front, and no one's ever asked me to serve in the manner of a religious." Fred sat perched on a stool at the end of the table.

Shelagh and Patrick exchanged glances. "Fred, we were hoping you might consider coming along to provide some of your...special

skills," Patrick told him. "From what we've been told, there's more than a bit of corruption in the local government, and we'll need someone who can act as a scrounger."

"Plus," Shelagh added, a sly smile lighting her face, "there's none better to play the Pied Piper when it comes time to dig the new wells. You could be a big help to us, Fred, but I know you may not want to leave Violet. There'll be no hard feelings if you decide to stay home."

He nodded. "I'll have to give it a good think. Plus, the Mrs. won't be none too happy if I don't discuss it wif her first."

"I suppose that leaves just me, then," Barbara Gilbert's voice piped up. Eleven pairs of eyes turned to her, and color came to her cheeks. "I'm not certain that my parents would approve of me going. They were unhappy enough when I told them I was coming to London if I'm honest." She looked about the room smiled her most "grown-up" smile. "Well hopefully, that's worn them down a bit. I'd hate for them to be disappointed when I tell them I'm going to Africa."

Shelagh squeezed Patrick's hand, her lips pressed together to hold back her excitement. "Well done. We couldn't have asked for more support. Thank you all so very much!" Unable to contain her joy, her smile burst forth and filled the room with brightness.

End
file.